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STATE FOR EUR AND EAP

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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/EU/ASEM: EU CONDEMNS BURMESE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AT ASEM

REF: HANOI 2795

Classified By: POL Counselor Andrew Schofer for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (SBU) Summary: Dutch MFA contacts have expressed relief that the October 7-9 ASEM summit in Hanoi proceeded smoothly. After months of negotiating the related issues of Burmese participation and EU sanctions, the summit itself was relatively "boring," according to one interlocutor. Only EU remarks condemning the human rights situation in Burma and the Burmese response were not pre-choreographed, and the fact that Luxembourg PM Juncker stepped in for the ailing Dutch PM Balkenende had no apparent impact on the substance or tone of the event. End Summary.

12. (C) MFA Director of Asian Affairs Robert Milders told poloff October 14 that the Dutch were satisfied with the results of the October 7-9 ASEM summit in Hanoi. He said that FM Bot had gone to ASEM with a primary intention of speaking out about the Burmese political and human rights situation, and that the delegation had been satisfied with the paragraph about Burma that ultimately appeared in the ASEM Chairman's Statement (see refel). Beyond that, he said, the meetings had been mostly "boring" as everything other than the exchange about Burma the whole meeting had been pre-negotiated. Separately, Milders told POLCOUNS that his biggest worry in the leadup to the ASEM Summit had been how to handle the last-minute substitution of Luxembourg PM Juncker for Dutch PM Balkenende in the EU Presidency seat. Milders said that he had had to draw on his 30-plus years of diplomatic experience to convince FM Bot and others in the ministry that this development would not undermine their position or disrupt the carefully choreographed Dutch strategy for the meetings. In the end, however, the substitution worked without a hitch.

13. (C) On October 13, MFA Asia Department officer Bernard Kelkas provided additional details of the Burma discussions at the summit. Kelkas said that Juncker made a statement in the opening session of the summit condemning Burma's internal political and human rights situation, which was "followed on" by Dutch FM Bot and then representatives from the EC, Sweden, UK, Czech Republic, Latvia, and Ireland. Participants condemned Burmese handling of the National Convention and treatment of National League for Democracy, called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, and pushed the Burmese to allow entry to the Special Representative of the Secretary General and NGOs. While the majority of Asian members did not comment on the issue, the Japanese Prime Minister reportedly asked Burma to make a "more serious effort" as a member of ASEM to deal with human rights concerns. Burmese representative U Tin Winn responded that Burma is following its "Seven Step Roadmap to Democracy" but argued that it is a "delicate process." He asked other states not to "rock the boat" by applying sanctions. Winn further commented that the NLD "was invited" to participate in the reconciliation process, but had chosen not to participate and instead "had chosen to live in a cocoon."

14. (C) According to Kelkas, during the same trip's Ministerial meeting with China, FM Bot asked the Chinese FM to continue pressuring Burma. China reportedly responded that it was prepared to do so, and also felt that ASEAN should continue to press Burma for change.

15. (C) In a separate meeting with POLCOUNS on October 14, Jaap Werner, Director of the MFA's Political Affairs Department, expressed satisfaction that the October 11 GAERC meeting had moved quickly to impose additional sanctions on Burma in response to the Burmese government's failure to make any progress on human rights. Werner stressed that the Dutch Presidency had worked hard to ensure that the EU presented a united front at the ASEM summit, and had then pushed the GAERC to adopt the new measures "automatically" rather than leaving the issue open to additional discussion. SOBEL